

Address Communications to the
Commandant Third Naval District

Telephone REctor 2-9100

In reply refer to No.

1308
Headquarters of the
Commandant Third Naval District
Federal Office Building, 90 Church Street
New York, N. Y.

8 September, 1943.

Mrs. Blanche Alpine Smith
3052 - 18th Avenue
Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada.

Dear Mrs. Smith;

Yes, indeed, I remember you very well and our visit aboard my pet ship, the COLORADO, in Los Angeles harbor. And I recall with as great pleasure the Reverend and Mrs. Noel Robertshawe in Auckland.

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I'm so glad you wrote me about Jerrold as his exploit aboard the WASP was the most thrilling I've seen in this war; and I had a grandstand seat for it, as it were - I was standing just where he set his plane down.

** You see his plane was fitted with an auxiliary gas tank because of the distance he had to fly, and when this tank dropped off, Jerrold knew he couldn't go on. Our Admiral (Captain at that time) had to make up his mind in a hurry whether to take a chance on letting him try to land on the deck - an explosion was a possibility. But Capt. Reeves is a man of decision and he ordered the decks cleared and everything readied for Jerrold.

The first time he came in he measured off the distance, and if he wasn't scared of a crash, I was. He got up speed and came in the second time for a perfect landing and stopped right in front of me, about 10 feet short of the end of the deck. You must remember that he had no hook and we couldn't put up a barrier for fear he would crash into it and hurt himself. I tell you, his feat was thrilling, exciting, marvelous.

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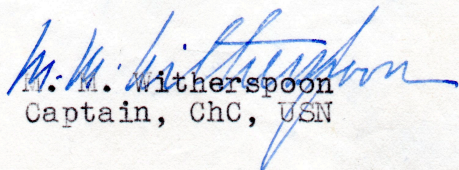
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The WASP crew went wild - they gave your son a tremendous ovation. That evening in the wardroom our Air Officer decorated Jerrold and made him an American airman. It was a wonderful evening. One of the moving spirits was the movie star, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., then a Lieutenant, junior grade in the WASP. He had the time of his life making a real celebration of the heroic and dashing deed. I sat at dinner with Jerrold that night who was quite excited as well he might be. Our band played in his honor; toasts were drunk (in Coca Cola); two of the mess boys marched in carrying the British and American flags; and another mess boy ended the procession bringing in a big cake. The Air Officer pinned our wings on your son, there were speeches and the most spontaneous Anglo-American feeling you could imagine.

After we left Malta, your son flew off at Gibraltar. I can't begin to tell you what a wonderful boy I thought he was. It grieves me to know that his luck didn't hold. I wish I could comfort you. I can say this: I feel strongly that Malta's holding out due to the reinforcements we were able to get in, was the turning point of the war. If it had to be, your son couldn't have been in a spot where he could have contributed more vitally. His spirit gave both the British and American naval and air forces new courage and determination to carry on. Those were critical, tense, dangerous days and his spectacular feat heartened us and made us feel that together as allies we could do anything. No single deed I know of contributed so much to morale. You can be very proud.

I feel sure our paths will cross again; it would be wonderful to talk with you. With my kindest regards, I am

Faithfully yours,


M. M. Witherspoon
Captain, ChC, USN